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CHAPTER VIII

COORG (Contd.)

IN the absence of a male issue in a house, a daughter is retained and married to a Coorg on condition that the children born are considered as the children of the wife's, and not of the husband's house. Such a husband may have another wife with children in his own house, and these have no share in the property of the other wife. Polygamy is not forbidden, but is seldom practised

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It is worthy of note that the Coorgs have no priest to preside over the wedding ceremony. There are no religious functions such as those prevailing among the higher Hindu castes. There are some magical acts, which are related here. The bride's hand is grasped in order that she may be delivered into the hands of her husband. She eats with him on the wedding day to create community of life. Marriage ceremonies in all stages of culture are intended to neutralise the dangers and to make the union safe, prosperous and happy. It referred to the permanent joint life of man and woman, and the essence of the union is the joining together of the bridal pair. The practice of throwing rice may have originated in the idea of giving food to the evil influences to induce them to be propitious and to depart It is considered as a token of blessing. In many cases, it seems to have developed into a sympathetic mode of fertility. At one stage of the wedding, the bride veiled approaches the husband, and they see each other. These ideas may explain the origin of the bridal veil. Besides there is sexual shyness, and the ideas associated with women that these are dangerous as well as improper, and so they lead to effeminacy. Accordingly, the bride spends the wedding days with her girl friends and the bridegroom with young men who in the marriage institution are respectively called bridesmaids and groomsmen.

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Polyandry

It has been observed that, in warlike races, the clannish feeling and family spirit often predominate over and absorb individual consciousness and personal rights. Among the Coorgs, family property descends not from father to son, as from generation to generation the eldest member acts as the head of the house. In olden times, the Coorgs are said to have lived in a state of general warfare, chief against chief, and Nadu against Nadu. As a relic of that age, the deep trenches which to this day are found intersecting the country in all directions may be considered. In such an age, destruction of life must have been great. But it was of course the male community that principally suffered in the turmoil. The people must soon

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[74 have been exterminated under such a state of affairs. But if the surviving
726 brothers were to become the rightful husbands of the widows, a second and
● 595 an undiminished generation might in time take the place of the fallen. In more recent times, the Rajas used to keep a large number of armed men constantly in attendance on themselves. They were absent from home for weeks and months. On their return, their brothers would have to go to the Palace or accompany the Raja on some hunting or fighting expedition. The brothers at home would then take the place of the absent from home
[428] and family. It is clear that the law of inheritance by the sister's son is unknown among the Coorgs. This, according to Richter, affords the strongest proof that polyandry is no Coorg custom.

Widow Marriage

587 Widows may remarry. Should any of the deceased husband's brothers choose to marry her, he may do so or she may be married to any other man. By doing so, she acquires the rights of the second husband and relinquishes all interest in her late husband's property, but not in her children. A second marriage is celebrated in a quiet manner and only the nearer relatives and some of the villagers are invited to the marriage feast. The strewing of rice and other ceremonies are dispensed with. After the removal of signs of widowhood, the bride appears in the apparel of married life.

Divorce

586 A man can divorce an unfaithful wife, but a wife has no remedy against her husband in case of his faithlessness. The Takkas, the Aruva of the house, the Takkas of the village, and some members of the wife's family with her Aruva meet in the hall of the husband's house, when as at betrothal the lamp is put between them; and the Aruva solemnly relinquishes the wife's claim to the husband's property. The children remain in the father's house and the unhappy woman returns with all her belongings to the parental roof. It has to be stated to the credit of Coorg women that such events are very rare.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

844 A woman's first confinement takes place at her mother's house whither she returns after the seventh month of pregnancy. There are no professional midwives among them. The women of the household who have
846 experience for their guidance render all the assistance. A few hours after birth she is bathed in very hot water, and with the abdomen well bound up, she is brought to bed in a lying posture in the best room of the house. This practice is quite at variance with what prevails among other Hindus
[783] who relegate a woman in childbirth to an outhouse. Though the period of pollution lasts for seven days, a woman enjoys immunity from all house-

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

carry the bride with them. On her return to her former home, she is treated as unclean, her dress and ornaments are taken from her; she is not permitted to touch anything in the house, and is shut up like a woman after childbirth. In this seclusion the young woman is kept for a fortnight, or a month, or even two months, according to the wealth and respectability of the family. From that time she becomes free. She goes back to her new home, and may now return on a visit to her mother's house, whenever she likes, without fear of molestation. In Kiggattnád the Coorgs have conformed in some measure to Badaga (Canarese) customs. There the new couple first meet in the bride's house and are both of them welcomed by the relatives and other guests. Then the same ceremony is gone through in the bridegroom's house, whither the party repair in company. But the true Coorg-rites are strictly observed in Coorg proper, or the Méndalenád, i. e. the northern part, the highland-country. For Kiggattnád is in many more respects, than geographical position only, below Méndalenád.

It has been asserted, both by Lieutenant Connor and Dr. Moegling, that the married life of the Coorgs is disfigured by the extraordinary and pernicious system of Polyandry or rather communism of women in one house. Also Col. Wilks in his History of Mysore (Second Edition, Madras 1869.) asserts as "perfectly true" (Vol. II p. 102.) a similar statement, contained in Tippu's address to the Coorgs, which is given further on in the historical part. Upon a careful examination of the matter, I may state as a fact, that, whatever may have been the custom in bygone ages, there is no such thing now practised amongst the Coorgs as a "national rite." That a people without the restraint of a morality, based upon pure and holy religious principles and enlivened by divine grace, should live together, exposed to great temptations, without occasionally falling into grievous sin, is too much to expect

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

581 from fallen nature; but we are not at liberty to record those solitary outbursts of evil passions as an established system or even custom; Hindus might as well regard the disclosures of our divorce-courts as the normal state of European matrimony. Whilst thus vindicating the honor of the married life of the Coorgs, I would not flatter their pride; but rather induce them to render and to maintain their family-hearths pure and honorable withal and to infuse also a better spirit into their public feasts, those popular schools of morality, from which all foul and indecent ribaldry should be banished for ever.

595 *Polygamy* is not prohibited amongst the Coorgs, but it seldom occurs and chiefly in cases, where the first marriage is not blessed with male issue. It also happens, that a young widow is taken to wife by another member of the same house, but this is a voluntary engagement on either part, and the woman loses all claim to her first husband's property, being now the wife of another.

687 567 564 582 The odd expression "*Sirkar wives*" refers to a tyrannical practice of the Rajahs, who, when severely punishing a Coorg house, exterminated all the men and reduced the women to a state of slavery, making them to work on the Sirkar farms or Panyas. Any low caste fellow, who applied for a wife to the Rajah, might then obtain one of these poor creatures, and such marriages may account for the comparatively fair and handsome appearance of many a low caste native of Coorg.

586 624 *Divorce* on account of unfaithfulness is a recognised institution and solemnly carried out by the Aruvas of the unhappy couple and by the Takkas of the village. The children remain in the father's house, the mother returns with all her belongings to the house of her parents. Should a reconciliation take place, the husband of a restored wife is looked down upon with contempt. No refutation of the alleged "communism of women" could be stronger than these facts.

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

near, that the Canarese original was destroyed and the Testament omitted in the copy by Vírarájender's successors. 175* 643* 428

His last words are:—"On the 7th of the Pushya month (Dec.—Jan.) Ractáxi year (1805) Capt. Mahoney brought the sword, sent by Marquis Wellesley from Bengal and fastened it round the Rájah's waist. In the Mágha month (Jan.—Feb.) 1806 Vírarája told Capt. Mahoney for the information of the Governor General, that on the day of his second marriage, when he sat on the throne with his Ráni, he had determined, that any son of his by this wife should be his successor; that his wife had born him two daughters. If any son be hereafter born of her, he would be the heir; but if it was the will [595] of God, that she should bear no son, then the three sons of his concubine, called Rájashékarappa, Shishushékappa and Chandrashékarappa should succeed to the throne. Since the above date, two more daughters, in all four, have been born by Mahadévaráni who died at 3 o'clock on Sunday the 7th day of the month Jéshta (May—June) 4909 Prabhava year (1807). As by her death the Rájah's hopes of having a son by her were blunted, and he was afraid, lest, if the succession devolved on the sons of another mother, they would create trouble to the four daughters of his lawful queen, the Rájah determined, that of the four daughters, who are named: Dévammáji, Muddammáji, Rájammáji and Mahádévammáji, the eldest should be married and whatever son she might have, he should be named Vírájendra, receive the Rájah's seal and the sword which was presented to him by Marquis Wellesley and be the successor to the throne. If she should, however, have no son, the son of either of her younger sisters according to seniority should be the successor and so long as the line of any of his four above named daughters continued, none of the heirs of the other mother should succeed to the throne; but, upon the family of his four daughters being extinct, the fittest of the above three sons or their posterity should suc-

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

to account his connection with the British Government. Letters and messages were despatched to Mr. Cole, the Resident in Mysore, requesting him to order the seizure of a refractory farmer, who had made his escape from Coorg after having committed a crime, and the delivery of the criminal to the servants of the Rájah. Mr. Cole had the man apprehended near Periapatna, and sent him back to Coorg with a letter to the Rájah, requesting information as to the guilt of and the punishment awarded to the refugee. No answer was given to the Resident. Channa Víra was carried to Kántamúrnád, where he was massacred with his whole family, twenty-two souls on one day. In 1826 Mr. Casamajor, the successor of Mr. Cole, despatched a Captain Monk to Mercara and charged him, among other things, to enquire after the fate of Channa Víra. Captain Monk was told by Vírarája, that there had been much sickness in the country during the last season, and that Channa Víra with his whole family had been swept away by cholera. After this inaugural bloodshed, the new Rájah seems to have shown less cruelty than his father or uncle. An intelligent Brahman, who is intimately acquainted with Coorg affairs, told me one day, that he estimated the victims of Dodda-Vírarája's reign at about five thousand; Lingarája, he thought, had not killed more than three thousand, or perhaps three thousand five hundred; and the late Rájah had not destroyed more than fifteen hundred lives, if so many. Still, the last man was a greater curse upon Coorg, than his predecessors. Less cruel he appears to have been. (The above estimate of Coorg murders is no doubt greatly exaggerated, but the proportion assigned to the three Rájahs agrees perfectly with the general tradition of the country.) But, if less cruel, Vírarája, young as he was at his accession to the government of Coorg, became a monster of sensuality. He kept the youngest of his father's wives for his use and increased his establishment of concubines to

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

about one hundred. A number of other women, of the best families, were summoned to Mercara after accouchements, and kept in a house near the palace during the period when they gave milk to their babes. Part of their milk was daily taken for the Rájah, to be used as a medicinal ingredient of his food which according to some superstitious notion became thereby more wholesome and nourishing. To refuse compliance with the demands of the master of Coorg was certain death, not to the recusant party only, but probably to the whole family. The wretch was free to riot as he pleased. He actually demanded to have the choice of all unmarried girls in the country. When hearing of this outrageous resolution, the Coorgs at once—it is said in one night—married all their grown up daughters. The Rájah was furious. Many of the unfortunate parents, who thus saved the honor of their children, were dreadfully flogged or had their ears cropped, or were thrown into prison. Rumours of these doings reached Mr. Casamajor. He reported to Government. But no reliable information was procurable. Coorg was kept hermetically sealed. Only a few passes were open. These were guarded by strong posts. Travellers were often detained. Without a passport no one could enter the country. On slight pretences persons were fined, maltreated, imprisoned. Some, who had gone to Coorg, disappeared altogether. Manuel Pereira, a British subject, was kept in custody by the Rájah; so was a Jew of the name of Samuel Joseph. Apprehensions were entertained for the safety of Dévammáji, the daughter and heiress of Dodda-Vírarája.

Mr. Casamajor went in person to Mercara, about the middle of November 1826, to make inquiries on the spot. He was too polite, and was completely baffled by the Rájah. The representative of the British Government was surrounded by guards and spies. No inhabitant of Coorg dared to answer his questions. The Rájah met his interrogations and admo-